Hot Chocolate

MAKES: 4 servings (about 4 cups)
TIME: 10 minutes
F O

Forget instant, this hot chocolate is rich, dark, and so satisfying. If you want it vegan, remember to check the ingredients on the chocolate to make sure it doesn't contain milk solids. Many quality dark chocolates (which may not be labeled vegan) don't include them.

4 ounces good-quality dark chocolate or vegan chocolate, chopped
4 cups milk or nondairy milk
2 tablespoons sugar
Whipped Cream or Vegan Whipped Cream (page 700 or 701) or marshmallows for garnish (optional)

1. Put the chocolate, milk, and sugar in a heavy saucepan over low heat. Whisk slowly until the chocolate melts and the sugar dissolves.
2. When the mixture is smooth and steamy, pour it into mugs, top with a dollop of whipped cream or marshmallows if you like, and serve.

MEXICAN HOT CHOCOLATE Traditionally made frothy with a *molinillo* (a wooden chocolate-stirring utensil), but you can use a whisk, an immersion blender, egg beater, electric mixer, or even a blender. If you can't find Mexican drinking chocolate, use bittersweet chocolate and add 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon: Replace the chocolate with 2 disks Mexican drinking chocolate (about 6 ounces), chopped, and add 2 split vanilla beans or 2 teaspoons vanilla extract to the pot in Step 1. For Step 2, remove from the heat and whisk or blend the chocolate mixture vigorously until it's frothy. Reheat if necessary and serve immediately.

SPANISH HOT CHOCOLATE Seriously rich and thick: Double the amount of chocolate and add ground cinnamon to taste, about 1 teaspoon, in Step 1.

SPICY HOT CHOCOLATE A bit of extra heat: Add a cinnamon stick or 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon and a small dried hot red chile or about ½ teaspoon red chile flakes to the saucepan in Step 1. Strain out the cinnamon stick and chile before serving.

HOT WHITE CHOCOLATE Nice looking, but not as rich: Replace the dark chocolate with white chocolate and omit the sugar. Garnish with a sprinkle of grated orange zest before serving.

7 More Flavored Hot Chocolates

1. Mocha: Add a shot of espresso before serving, or replace half the milk with coffee.
2. Minty: Add 1 teaspoon mint or peppermint extract before serving.
3. Vanilla: Add 2 teaspoons extract before serving.
4. Cardamom: Stir in 1 teaspoon ground cardamom before serving.
5. Bergamot: Add ½ teaspoon bergamot extract before serving, or add 2 bags Earl Grey tea to the mixture as it heats up.
6. Nutty: Whisk ¼ cup nut butter into the hot mixture until it dissolves, then let it heat another minute or two before serving.
7. Boozy: Add ¼ cup brandy, whisky, bourbon, or dark rum before serving.